UNITED
NATIONS

E

Economic and Social
Council

Distr.
GENERAL

E/CN.4/1998/51
30 January 1998

Original: ENGLISH

COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS
Fifty-fourth session
Item 9 (d) of the provisional agenda

FURTHER PROMOTION AND ENCOURAGEMENT OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS, INCLUDING THE QUESTION OF THE PROGRAMME AND METHODS OF WORK OF THE COMMISSION

HUMAN RIGHTS, MASS EXODUSES AND DISPLACED PERSONS

Human rights and mass exoduses

Report of the High Commissioner for Human Rights submitted pursuant to Commission resolution 1997/75

CONTENTS

	Paragraphs	Page
Introduction	1 - 7	2
I. HUMAN RIGHTS DIMENSIONS OF MASS EXODUSES	8 - 32	3
A. Main causes of mass exoduses	8 - 16	3
B. Human rights situations affecting refugees and displaced persons	17 - 25	5
C. Problems impeding voluntary return home	26 - 32	8
II. INFORMATION AND VIEWS ON SOLUTIONS	33 - 66	10
A. Early warning	33 - 41	10
B. Prevention	42 - 48	12
C. Preparedness and response	49 - 61	14
D. Return and durable solutions	62 - 66	18
III. STATES PARTIES TO SELECTED HUMAN RIGHTS INSTRUMENTS	67	19
IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	68 - 78	19

GE.98-10349 (E)

Introduction

1. The Commission on Human Rights, at its fifty-third session, adopted resolution 1997/75 entitled "Human rights and mass exoduses", in which it requested the High Commissioner for Human Rights to invite Governments, intergovernmental organizations, specialized agencies and non-governmental organizations to provide information and to prepare, within existing resources, and submit to the Commission at its fifty-fourth session an update of the previous report (E/CN.4/1997/42), including information on and recommendations and conclusions emerging from the action taken pursuant to the resolution, with particular attention to defining appropriate early warning capacities and ensuing implementation procedures and activities necessary to respond promptly and effectively.

2. In compliance with the resolution, notes verbales and circular letters were sent to all Governments and concerned organizations in August 1997, drawing their attention to the request mentioned above and asking that any information and views relating to these matters be sent to the High Commissioner/Centre for Human Rights by 15 October 1997. As it appeared that not all organizations had received the communication, letters were again sent out on 12 December 1997.

3. Information was received from the following Member States: Croatia, Kuwait, Russian Federation and United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

4. Replies were received from the following United Nations entities, specialized agencies and other intergovernmental organizations: United Nations Administrative Committee on Coordination/Subcommittee on Nutrition (ACC/SCN), United Nations Centre for International Crime Prevention, United Nations Department of Humanitarian Affairs (DHA), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), World Food Programme (WFP), Commonwealth Secretariat, and Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Replies were also received from the following non-governmental organizations: Quaker United Nations Office, Jesuit Refugee Service and the Lutheran World Federation.

5. Information was provided by the Special Rapporteurs and Special Representatives on the human rights situations in Afghanistan; the territory of the former Yugoslavia; Burundi; Iraq; Myanmar; and Sudan; the Representative of the Secretary-General on internally displaced persons; the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC); and the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD).

6. The report is divided into four main parts. Section I contains information on the causes of mass exoduses, their effects on the persons concerned and impediments to a voluntary return home. Section II includes general and specific approaches or measures taken to detect, prevent, mitigate or resolve situations of mass exoduses, as well as recommendations concerning those questions. Section III presents the new and total numbers of State

parties to selected human rights instruments, and section IV includes some concluding observations, together with recommendations specific to early warning.

7. It should be noted that the two first sections mainly constitute a compilation of the information received, and therefore do not pretend to be exhaustive in identifying the problems associated with and possible solutions to mass exoduses. For a more complete picture on these matters, reference is made to information provided in previous reports to the Commission on Human Rights. 1/ Regarding the steps taken to enhance system-wide response to emergencies and the efforts made to integrate human rights perspectives into those activities, an overview is provided in the 1997 report of the Secretary-General to the General Assembly entitled "Human rights and mass exoduses" (A/52/494). It should also be noted that although most of the information included relates to cross-border movements, information on internal displacement has also been included to some extent. This is the case where the problems identified are of a common or similar nature, and where elements contributing to a solution to internal displacement may also have a positive impact on addressing mass exoduses.

I. HUMAN RIGHTS DIMENSIONS OF MASS EXODUSES

A. Main causes of mass exoduses

8. UNHCR in its response observed that mass displacements are usually rooted in human rights violations, and also noted that internal conflicts, external aggression, internal and international social and economic injustices, economic disruption, emergence of ethnic tensions and environmental degradation are among the root causes of large-scale involuntary population displacements.

9. The Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Sudan reported that the civil war has killed an estimated 1.3 million persons since 1983 and resulted in the displacement of some 4 million southerners and hundreds of thousands of refugees fleeing to neighbouring countries. Following the escalation of fighting between January and August 1997, the human rights situation in the conflict zones deteriorated, and reports of the displacement of tens of thousands fleeing the war and of massive civilian casualties have continued to reach the Special Rapporteur. In the areas affected by armed conflict, the available reports and information indicate that all parties are responsible for violations of human rights, including the right to life, liberty and personal security of civilians, especially women, children and the elderly (see A/52/510).

10. The Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions has been informed of large-scale human rights violations, including violations of the right to life, which led to massive displacement of populations in Colombia, the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Sri Lanka (see E/CN.4/1998/68).

11. The Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar has been informed that between 5,000 and 25,000 Muslim refugees had fled over the border to Bangladesh in the first half of 1997 in order to escape forced

labour, portering and starvation. He noted that extensive recruitment for compulsory labour was mentioned as one of the main reasons for the mass exodus in 1991 and 1992, and continues to be an issue of concern. The forced relocation and other violations of the rights of persons belonging to minorities has resulted in a flow of refugees to neighbouring countries and the continuing attacks on groups have resulted in death, destruction and displacement. Many of the new refugees said that they had fled because of starvation. The food situation worsened in mid-1997 because of the severe inflation afflicting the whole of Myanmar. As the Government reportedly refused to allow local traders to import rice from Bangladesh, people were left with no option but to flee (see A/52/484).

12. In their joint response, the Lutheran World Federation and the Jesuit Refugee Service highlighted the exodus which was reported to have taken place from Bhutan between 1990 and 1993. According to the response, a rigorous policy to integrate the ethnic Nepalese into northern Bhutanese culture was perceived by persons belonging to the former group as an attack on their cultural identity. It resulted in unprecedented protests and unrest in 1990, following which widespread human rights violations led some 124,000 persons to flee to Nepal and India. The response further noted the lack of tangible progress towards finding a durable solution for this population, and underlined the risk that the refugees may eventually become stateless. The organizations emphasized the need for a peaceful and just solution to the plight of the Bhutanese refugees and the importance of the right to return, promoting the right to a nationality and combating the arbitrary deprivation of nationality.

Situations of internal displacement

13. The ACC/SNC in its response highlighted the situation in the Great Lakes Region, where an estimated 3.5 million people are considered to be in need of humanitarian assistance. It noted that security incidents appear to be intensifying in number and severity in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi and Rwanda, and that violence in the region is both leading to fresh population displacement and hampering humanitarian relief efforts. The Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Burundi in his report noted the alarming situation in the Nyanza-Lac region of southern Burundi resulting from violent clashes between military and rebel forces and army sweeps of the hills. At least 50,000 people were moved to regroupment camps, where they were cut off from all humanitarian assistance and exposed to cholera, malaria and dysentery (see A/52/505).

14. The Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan reported that fighting to the north of Kabul has resulted in the displacement of 200,000 persons into the city since the beginning of 1997. Numerous localities have been forcibly emptied of their population by the Taliban forces in order to pre-empt any attempts at resistance. Similarly, in the camps in Herat, there are some 25,000 registered internally displaced persons, most of whom came from the front-line areas in Badghis province. Allegations of an intentional displacement of population, mostly to hinder perceived support for military opponents, have also been made in this connection (see A/52/493).

15. The Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iraq indicated that forcible relocations continue to take place in the context of a policy aimed at changing the demography of the oil-rich sectors of Kirkuk and Khanaquin by deporting ethnic Kurdish and Turkomen families. The Special Rapporteur has found that the phenomenon of forced displacement appears largely if not exclusively to involve ethnic minorities. In order to increase the percentage of the Arab population in the predominantly Kurdish areas, the Government of Iraq has forced entire communities to undergo internal deportation. It is reported that the real and personal property left by the deportees is then given to ethnic Arabs coming from other parts of Iraq; several villages are also reported to have been entirely destroyed. Reports and testimonies received by the Special Rapporteur indicate that the victims of displacement are almost exclusively Kurds, Turkomen and Assyrians living in the city of Kirkuk and its surroundings (see A/52/476).

16. During 1997, cases of forced eviction and deportation seemed to occur with great frequency and as a matter of policy. Most of the displaced stated that they were given at most one week's notice to move, and were threatened with arrest if they did not comply. They were reportedly forced to move either to the southern governorates of the country or to the three northern governorates. They were allowed to take with them all their belongings only if they agreed to move to the southern governorates. Given the fact that the displaced usually move to the neighbouring northern governorates of Iraq, such as the city of Suleymaniyah, to join relatives or friends originating from the same area and sharing the same ethnicity, they have to leave their property without any compensation - property which is reportedly immediately stolen, confiscated or destroyed by the authorities. According to information received by the Special Rapporteur, the Government of Iraq has since 1995 forcibly expropriated agricultural lands belonging to Turkomans in Kirkuk, paying only symbolic sums which are not even equivalent to one year's yield. Ownership of the expropriated lands has allegedly been transferred to high-level officials of the regime, including members of Saddam Hussein's family. All the agricultural lands around the village of Turklan, which belonged to Turkoman peasants, were reportedly confiscated. The village was then demolished, and its inhabitants were displaced to the Tammuz and Al-Shaheed complexes near Tikrit.

B. Human rights situations affecting refugees and displaced persons

17. ACC/SNC in its response highlighted the nutritional status among some 21,000 refugees from Myanmar, who remain in two camps in Bangladesh. A survey in those camps has revealed a decline in nutritional status, due to an absence of nutritionally balanced diets since November 1996, the fact that the most vulnerable families have been left following repatriations, and that refugees sell and trade food items in order to buy other necessary items. In addition, it is thought that in some cases families have shared their rations with new arrivals, who do not receive rations, and it was noted that a recent forced repatriation of 400 refugees led people to refuse daily rations for up to two weeks. It is reported that overall, the refugees can be considered to be at high risk of mortality. 2/

18. The Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan was informed by Afghan refugees living in Pakistan that since the international community had stopped providing aid to refugees, the primary cause of death was lack of food. Some refugees stated that there were those among them who could not afford the cloth in which to wrap a corpse. People had to share a single piece of bread and had no energy to work. Most refugees stated that they lived on bread and tea and had no money for medicines when they fell ill. The representatives of the Commissionerate for Afghan Refugees informed the Special Rapporteur that the principal problems they had encountered concerned the situation of widows and orphans; the lack of vocational training for recent female arrivals; the lack of equipment for blood screening; and problems related to chronic diseases. The Special Rapporteur also noted that education beyond primary school has been halted because of severe budget cuts in international aid, although the refugee camps might constitute the venues of the only remaining organized education for Afghan women. A number of private groups are maintaining a few secondary school facilities. It is estimated that 4,000 Afghan girls and 35,000 Afghan boys currently receive education in Peshawar.

19. The Special Rapporteur was also informed about other difficulties faced by Afghan refugees, including having their houses searched and being stopped on the street and asked for documents. It has been alleged that a large number of male Afghan refugees, including teenage boys, were being arrested and imprisoned for reasons such as lack of a valid passport. Even those with valid documents or those who had sent their passports for extension were reported to have been arrested. In addition, shops and businesses belonging to Afghans have been closed. Afghan refugee women told the Special Rapporteur that they did not feel safe in Peshawar. It was reported, however, that the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Pakistan had stated on 13 August 1997 that Afghan refugees would not be forced out of Pakistan and that Pakistan would assist with their voluntary repatriation. Many of the refugees whom the Special Rapporteur met voiced fears about their future since a number of their dwellings had already been razed and they were to be relocated to an alternative site in the area. A Pakistani official assured the refugees in the Special Rapporteur's presence that their relocation would take place gradually, over a period of three to four years, although the authorities would prefer that they repatriate.

20. Information received also indicates that refugees have been victims of attacks, killings and threats to their lives in several parts of the world. The Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan reports that the security of Afghan refugees in Pakistan has on occasion continued to be precarious. On 30 May, it was reported that a former commander of the Hezbe Islami political party and another man had been shot dead by unidentified gunmen in the Hayatabad neighbourhood of Peshawar. An Afghan refugee and his two sons had reportedly been killed in a camp in the vicinity of Peshawar on 28 April. It was reported that the former Governor of Kandahar province had been kidnapped by six armed men on the outskirts of Quetta (see A/52/493). Similarly, the Special Representative on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran was informed of several attacks against Iranian Kurdish refugees in the Iraqi province of Suleimania, particularly against members of the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan, allegedly committed by persons working for the Iranian Government. Such

attacks reportedly took place in early April 1997 and on 24 June and 14 and 19 August 1997, and resulted in 85 persons killed or wounded (see A/52/472).

21. It has also been reported to the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions that refugees and internally displaced persons were victims of violations of the right to life in Colombia, Sri Lanka and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In addition, the Special Rapporteur was informed of violations of the right to life of refugees from Myanmar in Thailand. According to the source of the information, attacks by Government troops and/or members of the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army, a Karen militia allegedly backed by the Government, on several camps of Myanmar refugees in Thailand led to several deaths (see E/CN.4/1998/68). The Special Rapporteur also transmitted urgent appeals to the Government of Angola, Malawi, Panama, Turkey and the United Republic of Tanzania on behalf of persons or groups of persons who were reportedly at risk of imminent extradition, refoulement or return to countries where there were serious grounds to believe that their lives were at risk.

22. UNFPA in its response noted that access to reproductive health care and family planning are vital human rights and health concerns of populations affected by natural or man-made disasters. Such a situation poses particular dangers to women during pregnancy, childbirth or post-partum recovery, and also exposes women and adolescents to greater risks of sexual exploitation, abuse and violence.

23. As regards the problems faced by displaced, refugee and asylum-seeking children, the Committee on the Rights of the Child has during 1997 expressed various concerns in regard to the adverse impact of conflict on the enjoyment of children's rights; the problem of statelessness; the lack of adequate legislation on refugees in general, the inadequate application of the law and policy concerning children seeking asylum, particularly as regards methods of interviewing children for status determination; the lack of a comprehensive system of protection involving social and/or judicial authorities which would apply to those children while subject to the jurisdiction of the State party, as well as in the process of returning to their country of origin; the insufficient attention paid to the specific needs and rights of children in asylum-seeking situations and the provisions of the general principles of non-discrimination, best interest and respect for the views of the child not being given adequate weight by administrative bodies dealing with refugee children; the provision of health and education not being consistent with the principles and provisions of the Convention; the resort of immigration officials to measures of deprivation of liberty of children for security or other related purposes. Specific references to unaccompanied, displaced, asylum-seeking or refugee children can be found in the concluding observations adopted by the Committee on Algeria, Australia, Azerbaijan, Ghana, Myanmar, New Zealand, Panama and Togo.

Situations of internal displacement

24. The Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iraq in his report to the General Assembly (A/52/476) noted that displacement has left the affected families in a much worse economic and social situation. Tens of thousands of Kurdish and Turkoman families from Kirkuk now live in tents and

camps in the region from which the Government withdrew its authorities in October 1991. Those families live in extremely harsh conditions, resulting in many deaths, especially among small children and the elderly. Many families remain without much support. They often suffer from fear and anxiety associated with loss of work, social role and home. For the most part, they depend for their survival on assistance from relief organizations and international aid provided by non-governmental organizations and the United Nations.

25. ACC/SNC also noted that both fighting and the presence of landmines in Burundi contribute to food insecurity, impede efforts to assess and deliver humanitarian aid and prevent farmers from working in the fields. The imposition of sanctions also reduces the availability of farm inputs and leads to price increases, making otherwise available food too expensive to buy for most people. Approximately 570,00 people are reported to be housed in "regroupment camps" in particularly insecure provinces, ostensibly for their own protection. There have been many reports of poor living conditions in these camps, with lack of adequate sanitation facilities, inadequate food supplies and lack of medical care. Two recent surveys made in Kayanza province revealed that the under-five mortality rate was 4.7/10,000/day, four times the usual level. In addition, it has been reported that attacks by insurgents on regroupment camps have taken place, and in one instance that the camp population was evicted and the site burned. 3/

C. Problems impeding voluntary return home

26. The Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan noted that owing to the continued fighting in many parts of Afghanistan, the repatriation of refugees has not been significant during the period under review. The number of Afghan refugees in Pakistan and in the Islamic Republic of Iran is estimated at 1.2 million and 1.4 million respectively, and it is estimated that some 400,000 refugees have arrived in Pakistan over the past year. The principal reasons cited by refugees for being reluctant to return to Afghanistan are the continuing instability in the country, economic hardship and the absence of education opportunities for their children, in particular girls, who can no longer be educated in the greater part of Afghanistan (see A/52/493).

27. In her report (A/52/490), the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the territory of the former Yugoslavia noted that the security of returnees, especially those returning to areas where they would be in the minority, continues to be a serious problem in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Many administrative obstacles, which may appear insignificant at first, also hinder returns owing to their cumulative effect. Illegal requests for visas, customs duties and road taxes prevent freedom of movement and, indirectly, returns. Civil registration, required at the municipal level, is another area of concern. Another obstacle to returns appears to be excessive retroactive taxation of people who left their municipalities during the war.

28. The Special Rapporteur noted that legal regulations affecting occupancy rights and the right to private property are among the main factors preventing return of refugees and the displaced. She also reported that destruction of housing has continued in many areas throughout

Bosnia and Herzegovina. The houses involved are clearly targeted with the intent to deter the return of refugees and displaced persons belonging to local minorities. On 2 and 3 May 1997, some 25 houses were set on fire in the Croat-controlled municipality of Drvar (Federation), where displaced Serbs have been trying to return. Houses were also destroyed in the zone of separation near Brčko, and in Stolać, where displaced Bosnians have been returning under a pilot project.

29. Similarly, CERD expressed its deep concern that in spite of the guarantees in the peace agreement concerning the right of all refugees and displaced to freely return to their homes of origin, serious obstacles to return continue to exist in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and that property laws which conflict with the peace agreement remain in effect in the two principal entities of Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is profoundly disturbed that little progress is being made in the apprehension of persons indicted by the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia.

30. The Special Rapporteur also noted that the question of return continues to be a contentious issue in Croatia. While the authorities have encouraged the immigration of some 180,000 Bosnian and Kosovo Croats and another 80,000 ethnic Croats are expected to arrive from Germany, the Special Rapporteur recalled that as many as 200,000 Croatian Serbs had fled to Yugoslavia and Bosnia and Herzegovina after Croatia's military actions in the former Sectors West, North and South in 1995. The security situation in these areas remains unstable and acts of looting, harassment, discrimination and killings, sometimes by explosive devices, continue to be reported. The ongoing violence remains one of the main impediments to the return of Croatian Serb refugees and displaced persons. Although the Croatian police presence appears to have been increased, its effectiveness varies considerably, with units in some districts reacting promptly to criminal activity while others do not. The situation is aggravated by difficult economic circumstances for all residents but, in particular, for Croatian Serbs, who are often the victim of discriminatory practices.

31. The Special Rapporteur has learned about several violent incidents affecting Croatian Serb returnees. For example, on 27 February 1997 in Vojnic, former Sector North, some 100-150 Croats from Bosnia and Herzegovina gathered to demonstrate following a rumour of the arrival of several busloads of Croatian Serb returnees. The demonstration was followed by bomb attacks and anti-Serb graffiti, such as "Death to the Serbs" and "Serbs Out", on at least 11 buildings. On 13 May, a serious incident occurred in Hrvatska Kostajnica, former Sector North. It was sparked by the voluntary return of 9 displaced persons from the region of Eastern Slavonia, provoking some 150 ethnic Croat settlers from Bosnia and Herzegovina to riot. Armed with stones and wooden sticks, they attacked and beat the returnees, destroyed their homes and ransacked their personal possessions. The Government attributed this incident to the "spontaneity" of the return, which had occurred outside the framework of an agreement for organized returns signed by the Government with the United Nations Transitional Administration for Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Sirmium (UNTAES) and UNHCR on 23 April.

32. The Special Rapporteur is concerned about restrictive conditions sometimes imposed on return to the country by Croatian Serb refugees in

possession of valid Croatian citizenship certificates, the domovnica. Many refugees who intend to repatriate to Croatia from Yugoslavia with the help of UNHCR, or who spontaneously return on the basis of a domovnica, are no longer able to cross the border without first obtaining additional travel documents from the Croatian embassy abroad. However, there is no established procedure for Croatian citizens to obtain valid passports or travel documents from Croatian embassies in neighbouring countries.

II. INFORMATION AND VIEWS ON SOLUTIONS

A. Early warning

33. In the context of preventive measures, the Government of the Russian Federation highlighted the work of the Russian Federation State Committee on Statistics, which has prepared charts reflecting various scenarios of immigrant flows into Russia from the CIS and Baltic States for the years 1996 to 1999. For each of these years, the charts present three alternative figures, broken down by country of departure and region of arrival. In addition, the CIS countries are operating a research council on involuntary migration, which is engaged in forecasting involuntary displacements of population and drawing up proposals to prevent them.

34. CERD in its response recalled the complaints voiced at the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights that the United Nations was stirred into action only after massive human rights abuses had taken place. The treaty bodies are unique in being able to exercise a preventive function, sounding early warnings and recommending urgent action. CERD noted that many mass exoduses result from actions which bear with disproportionate harshness upon particular ethnic or national groups. Therefore, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination is of particular relevance and CERD one of the most important organs for issuing early warning of developments likely to cause such exoduses. CERD has identified among its criteria for early warning a lack of an adequate legislative basis for defining and criminalizing all forms of racial discrimination, including the lack of recourse procedures; a pattern of escalating racial hatred and violence, or racist propaganda; a significant pattern of racial discrimination evidenced in social and economic indicators; and significant flows of refugees or displacement persons resulting from a pattern of racial discrimination or encroachment on the lands of minority communities.

35. The Committee highlighted its establishment as one of its regular and principal agenda items the question of prevention of racial discrimination, including early warning measures and urgent action procedures. To guide its work in this regard, the Committee in 1993 adopted a working paper which elaborates on the possible efforts to prevent serious violations of the Convention. Early warning measures would aim at addressing existing problems so as to prevent them from escalating into conflicts, and include confidence-building measures to identify and support structures to strengthen racial tolerance and solidify peace in order to prevent a relapse of conflict where it has occurred. The urgent procedures would aim at responding to problems requiring immediate attention to prevent or limit the scale or number

of serious violations of the Convention. Under this item, the Committee at its fifty-first session reviewed the situations in Bosnia and Herzegovina the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Israel and Papua New Guinea.

36 DHA in its response provided an update on the status of the Humanitarian Early Warning System (HEWS). It indicated that HEWS, having established the information base for analyses of country situations, now is focusing on maintaining a list of vulnerable areas and in-depth profiles of those areas.

37. Among its sources of information, HEWS utilizes, inter alia, the sectoral early warning systems of United Nations specialized agencies and Member States, events reported by news agencies, reports of United Nations special rapporteurs as well as other sources, and economic indicators available from UNDP and the World Bank. In addition, this information has in some cases been supplemented with field-based country-specific indicators. These indicators capture information deemed most important for the country concerned by area experts and field staff, but which is not ordinarily monitored. Field-based analysis of situations is considered vital to early warning. In this regard, DHA intends to integrate its three projects related to collection, analysis and dissemination of information, namely, ReliefWeb, HEWS and Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRINs). IRIN will work with area experts on countries of concern to identify the country-specific indicators, monitor these indicators in collaboration with the Resident Representative, and report them to Headquarters. HEWS will focus on subsequent Headquarters analysis with a view to formulating action-oriented recommendations.

38. HEWS currently supports the Framework for Coordination mechanism established between the Department of Political Affairs, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and DHA. Under this framework, a director-level consultation takes place between the three departments on a weekly basis, for the purpose of reviewing ongoing and potential emergency situations. Here, areas of concern from a humanitarian perspective can be raised with the other departments to initiate interdepartmental thinking on potential situations. This mechanism has worked well to increase information flow among the departments and to flag emerging situations to other departments. This is, however, an oversight mechanism and does not go into the substance of the situations. It is envisaged that inter-agency collaboration on early warning will increase to facilitate joint analysis and contingency planning. Over the past few years, many of the operational agencies have been working to enhance early warning capacities in their sectors. These may now be in a position to contribute substantially to inter-agency early warning/contingency planning discussions.

39. Within the context of the restructuring of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), an integrated human rights information network has been developed as an essential part of the OHCHR information management strategy for the coming years. Considering that preventive activities need to be undertaken by the High Commissioner in the most timely manner, the Office has made information management a high priority objective. The Human Rights Computerized Analysis Environment (HURICANE) information system has been conceived to achieve efficient information management through the application of information technology. The functions

and facilities of HURICANE have been conceptualized on the basis of an inventory of information materials which existed in the Office and various needs of the staff users. It is now at its initial stage, and requires further structural design and programming to be fully operational.

40. Its main objectives are the improvement of horizontal and vertical communication and to provide a more transparent and usable human rights information archive, which is to be complemented by a pool of relevant links to NGOs. Improved access to information should in turn facilitate collection, verification and analysis of information, thereby enhancing research and promoting efficiency in the work within the Office. The new information network system is also expected to provide the High Commissioner for Human Rights with the necessary factual and analytical information for decision-making. Once the system becomes fully operational, it will enable the Office to process information more quickly in order to take the necessary action in a more timely manner. Initial analysis of information received could be programmed into the system in such a way that relevant elements for early warning on large-scale population displacements are available for in-depth examination.

41. In the view of the Quaker United Nations Office, the focus given to early warning in the resolution is questionable. It argues that other entities of the United Nations system are assigned to this task, and that there has been a positive shift from prevention through early warning, to a greater emphasis on prevention through development and rehabilitation. To that end, programmes of advisory services and technical cooperation should be further strengthened. It noted that a variety of agencies and human rights mechanisms are gathering information on situations creating or affecting refugees and internally displaced persons, and that the importance of such information is determined largely by the effectiveness of the process for sharing and acting on such information. To this end, the High Commissioner for Human Rights should ensure that the reports of special rapporteurs and field offices are circulated and read, and that OHCHR is properly represented at inter-agency discussions in order to raise the issues, in particular the need for a response to existing early warning information.

B. Prevention

42. UNHCR in its response highlighted the complex pattern of human rights violations that usually precede mass outflows of persons. It noted that internal displacements and cross-border refugee mass movements often have the same causes, and that it is therefore important to address the reasons for internal displacement in order to prevent mass movements. For this reason, UNHCR collaborates with a range of different partners to monitor the treatment of threatened groups and report human rights violations to the international community. UNHCR also noted that the risk of further mass exoduses can be high in areas of repatriation, where returning refugees are in need of protection and assistance in order to ensure the enjoyment of their human rights. In an effort to assess such problems, UNHCR has expanded its activities in countries of origin to consolidate voluntary repatriation and prevent new displacement. In these situations, UNHCR seeks to play an active solution-oriented and preventive role, often assisting internally displaced persons as well as returning refugees.

43. UNHCR noted that preventing refugee flows often requires adequate human rights protection within the country of origin. The basis for UNHCR's involvement in legal and judicial capacity-building in countries of origin is derived from the mandate to seek lasting and durable solutions to refugee problems. Assistance and support to States in their development of national systems that can provide such protection have as their ultimate goal respect for rule of law and human rights. UNHCR has taken several such initiatives, usually in collaboration with other offices, most notably the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. These include the provision of training to government officials in human rights and humanitarian principles, promotion of development of strong civil and non-governmental institutions, and encouraging Governments to recognize human rights and minority rights in their legal systems and constitutional arrangements. Furthermore, UNHCR has recently strengthened its efforts to advise Governments concerning their nationality legislation, and to encourage them to accede to the conventions on statelessness. Stateless persons are particularly vulnerable to forced displacement, and addressing this problem is essential to preventing the root causes of refugee flows.

44. UNHCR recognizes the need for comprehensive approaches by the international community to prevent and respond to situations of displacement, and noted that action is often needed in areas which lie beyond its competence and mandate. Therefore, cooperation and coordination with other humanitarian, human rights and development organizations are essential. Furthermore, UNHCR emphasized that an essential condition for the prevention of involuntary mass movements is adequate political will on the part of the States directly concerned, and by the international community as a whole. Accordingly, UNHCR puts great emphasis on coordinating its activities with States and relevant international organizations. It highlighted the importance of creating clearly formulated and agreed guidelines for humanitarian action, governed by the international rule of law and including principles of refugee law and human rights. As examples of collaboration on the regional level, UNHCR highlighted the CIREFCA process in Central America (concluded in 1994), the Comprehensive Plan of Action (CPA) in South-East Asia (concluded 1996), and the CIS Conference (1996). The objective of each was to devise integrated regional strategies to address existing problems of displacement and to prevent further population movements.

45. UNHCR indicated that in specific situations, such as in Viet Nam and Albania, mass information campaigns have played a significant part in reducing the outflow of migrants. The campaigns were directed towards certain regions and provided information to "would-be" asylum seekers and migrants on the implications of departure, with the objective of preventing large numbers of people migrating when they would, in fact, receive adequate levels of protection in their countries of origin. UNHCR emphasized that this procedure is, however, not an alternative to giving people the international protection they are entitled to, and that care has to be taken not to deny people the right to asylum.

46. The Commonwealth Secretariat indicated that its emphasis in the human rights field has for the past four years concentrated upon creating awareness of the international human rights instruments, assisting with institution-building and management of national human rights bodies, and

capacity-building among national personnel concerned with the promotion and protection of human rights, including the reporting obligations undertaken under international conventions. The development of awareness or capacity relating specifically to early warning of potential mass exoduses has not been a part of these activities. Recently, the Commonwealth has committed itself and the efforts of its secretariat to the humanitarian problems associated with refugees and internally displaced persons. This is likely, subject to specific demands by Member States, to concentrate on awareness-, capacity- and institution-building at the national level.

47. In its response, the United Nations Centre for International Crime Prevention called attention to the relevant provisions of the United Nations standards and norms in the field of crime prevention and criminal justice.

Situations of internal displacement

48. The Representative of the Secretary-General on internally displaced persons in his response drew attention to the work undertaken to identify, analyse and consolidate existing law pertaining to the protection and assistance needs of internally displaced persons. He recalled that he had presented to the Commission on Human Rights at its fifty-second session a compilation and analysis of legal norms (E/CN.4/1996/52/Add.2) which examined relevant provisions of human rights, humanitarian and refugee law, so as to determine the extent to which existing law provided adequate coverage for their needs. He noted that UNHCR has produced a reference manual for its staff on the basis of the compilation, to enhance their understanding of standards relevant to their protection and assistance activities in countries of origin. On the basis of the legal compilation, the Commission on Human Rights encouraged the Representative to develop a comprehensive framework for the protection of internally displaced persons. The Representative is accordingly in the process of compiling a set of guiding principles which will seek to address displacement in all its phases, notably by spelling out standards that provide protection from arbitrary displacement, to be submitted to the Commission at its current session (E/CN.4/1998/53/Add.2).

C. Preparedness and response

49. In its response, the Government of the Russian Federation expressed its concern at the scale and magnitude of exoduses and displacement in many regions of the world and the extensive human suffering of refugees and displaced persons in the former Soviet Union, where such displacements have involved some 9 million people during the 1990s. Consequently, the implementation of the Programme of Action adopted by the Regional Conference to address the Problems of Refugees, Displaced Persons, Other Forms of Involuntary Displacement and Returnees in the Countries of the CIS and relevant Neighbouring States, in which significant emphasis is placed on the phenomenon of mass exoduses, is a matter of priority for Russia. The Government refers to the meeting of the Steering Group held as a part of the follow-up to the Conference, at which a number of positive developments as regards migration in the region and the complementary nature of national efforts and international support were noted. In the view of the Russian Federation, there remains an imbalance in these efforts, pointing to

the need to step up international cooperation. A paper presented at the meeting of the Steering Group on the steps taken by the Russian Federation to implement the Programme of Action was attached to the reply.

50. The Government considers that there is a great need for more active involvement by OHCHR, in cooperation with UNHCR, in efforts to implement the Programme of Action, and in the tasks enumerated in Commission resolution 1997/75.

51. In its response, the Government of Kuwait noted that it has rarely been faced with refugee situations, and that the situations it did face following the liberation were dealt with in an efficient and competent manner, in accordance with relevant international humanitarian standards. It was noted that although Kuwait has not yet acceded to the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, it is diligently applying the humanitarian principles embodied in that Convention as well as those derived from international customary practice. In accordance with its Constitution, Kuwait is committed to the principle of non-refoulement.

52. As regards the efforts made by States to respond to refugee situations, it was emphasized that Kuwait, in keeping with its profound belief in humanitarian causes, has consistently approached the phenomenon from a purely humanitarian standpoint. This was illustrated by Kuwait's provision of extended material and moral aid and assistance in all fields to refugees in various parts of the world, and to States afflicted by natural disasters which have led to the displacement of thousands of victims. Kuwait has also supported international humanitarian endeavours to alleviate and put an end to the ordeal suffered by refugees, notably by providing material and moral support for the activities of UNHCR, United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, the International Committee of the Red Cross and other humanitarian organizations operating in this field. Furthermore, the Government agreed to allow UNHCR to open an office in Kuwait and has supported its activities. It was pointed out that the head of the UNHCR mission has commended the Government for the cooperation with UNHCR and indicated that the agreement under which UNHCR had opened the office would be used as a model for similar future agreements with other States.

53. With its response, the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland enclosed statistics on asylum applications and initial determination decisions, broken down by location of application and nationality, for the year 1996. The charts indicate that some 6 per cent of asylum seekers were recognized as refugees and granted asylum by initial determination decisions, some 13 per cent were not recognized as refugees but were granted exceptional leave to remain in the country, and some 81 per cent were refused both asylum and exceptional leave. The Government observed that there is no evidence to suggest that people are leaving the United Kingdom on human rights grounds, and that official statistics confirm that there is no mass exodus from the United Kingdom. The response further highlighted global and regional human rights instruments to which the United Kingdom is a party, including those relating to refugees, statelessness and torture, and indicated that the United Kingdom provides information to UNHCR in accordance with article 35 of the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees.

54. WFP in its response reaffirmed the great importance it attaches to the issues raised in the resolution, noting that access to adequate levels of food should be considered within the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and that WFP has consistently worked to enhance its preparedness and response strategy to deal with large-scale population displacements and other types of crisis situations. It recalled that the Commission at its fifty-third session declared as intolerable the fact that 800 million people throughout the world, and particularly in developing countries, do not have enough food to meet their basic nutritional needs and noted that this is an infringement of their fundamental rights. WFP accordingly emphasized that there still needs to be much more attention and resources devoted to ending hunger.

55. In order to promote an effective response, WFP has pursued a threefold strategy. First, with respect to advance planning for potential emergencies, activities aimed at improving WFP's emergency preparedness have included vulnerability analysis and mapping, contingency planning, and assessments of logistical capacities and intervention options. Second, WFP has strengthened its efforts with respect to the inputs required for immediate response to large-scale population movements and other types of humanitarian emergencies. Funding, food stocks, human resources, equipment and service packages have all been reviewed to ensure that emergency preparedness levels are enhanced. WFP's network of offices throughout the developing world, with projects that allow for temporary borrowing of food and logistics, have given the Programme a comparative advantage in reacting quickly and effectively to new emergency situations and needs. Third, emergency management has been improved, including by steps to decentralize WFP's operations through increased delegation of authority to the field, in order to facilitate the effectiveness of its ability to respond to humanitarian needs.

56. Beyond its own efforts to enhance its preparedness and response capacity with respect to large-scale population displacements, WFP has consistently participated in and supported inter-agency efforts to ensure a more integrated and coordinated United Nations response to such events. WFP views the participation of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in both the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs as a positive development which will allow for a more holistic approach by the United Nations system to the relationships between human rights and humanitarian issues. WFP fully endorses the views expressed in the report of the Secretary-General to the Economic and Social Council at its substantive session of 1997 on review of the capacity of the United Nations system for humanitarian assistance. In particular, it agrees that inter-agency consultations on early warning should be resumed and the conclusions channelled into the Inter-Agency Standing Committee process in order to facilitate integrated multisectoral contingency planning and preparedness activities.

57. WFP continues to work with partners at the local, national and international levels to reinforce activities to implement sustainable food security policies as well as to meet the humanitarian needs of persons affected by complex emergencies. In line with UNHCR's reply, WFP noted that memorandums of understanding (MOUs) and other bilateral agreements are extremely helpful in giving consistency and predictability to the relationships between organizations as well as for accelerating the response

to new emergency situations such as mass exodus. In WFP's view, MOUs not only clarify the division of responsibilities but also recognize and rely on each organization's comparative advantages and special skills.

58. UNFPA is concerned that the needs for reproductive health care and family planning are addressed with the same urgency that is devoted to other aspects of emergency relief. To this end, UNFPA will work in close cooperation with other agencies and organizations within the overall coordination framework for operational activities set by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee under the guidance of the Emergency Relief Coordinator. Assistance will focus on the provision of reproductive health and family planning counselling and services, and funding provided for equipment, supplies and drugs needed for delivery of services such as the prevention and treatment of reproductive tract infections, including sexually transmitted diseases (STDS), and the prevention of HIV/AIDS. UNFPA also provides technical assistance, training and salary support for health personnel. UNFPA is prepared to commit funding during any phase of relief operations to assist persons in need, including refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced persons and other persons of concern, or returnees. Its assistance will be channelled through United Nations organizations, government agencies and non-governmental organizations with the capacity to operate in difficult situations.

59. Among its suggestions and recommendations, the Committee on the Rights of the Child has referred to the following: to incorporate human rights education on child rights in training curricula of police and immigration officials; to make available information on children's rights to all refugee children in their own language; to introduce legislation for the protection of the rights of refugees, in line with the relevant international standards; to review existing legislation and procedures as to their compatibility with the Convention; to undertake a comprehensive review of the policy in relation to children seeking asylum in the light of the provisions and principles of the Convention; to implement article 22 and general principles in matters related to the protection of refugee children, including deportation procedures, and to seek solutions in order to avoid expulsions causing the separation of families; to use deprivation of liberty as a measure of last resort.

60. In its response, the Quaker United Nations Office emphasized the convergence of work between OHCHR and UNHCR. It called for a strengthening of the links between the two institutions, in particular in the areas of human rights monitoring and promotion, technical assistance, institution-building and rehabilitation projects, so as to strengthen human rights protection for refugees in the context of mass exodus.

61. The Quaker United Nations Office further argued that the resolution and report on mass exoduses must have a clearer and different focus in order to be useful. It suggested that future reports could provide information on recent policy initiatives and on current or proposed human rights field activities related to refugees and internally displaced persons. The Office further suggested that the work of the Commission could be enhanced by focusing attention on issues of forced displacement, rather than dividing its attention between mass exoduses and the internally displaced. Through a combined resolution, a new special representative could provide a high-level focal

point within the human rights system able to participate in the requisite political discussions. Such a person could also stimulate UNHCR and OHCHR to strengthen their activities toward the ultimate goal of preventing human rights violations which cause refugee movements.

D. Return and durable solutions

62. In its response, the Government of Croatia indicated as its main area of concern the effective implementation of the process of return of refugees, rather than the development of early warning activities. The "both-ways" process of return of refugees and displaced people is considered a necessary confidence-building measure and a prerequisite for the successful process of peaceful reintegration.

63. The response provided focused on displaced persons from Croatian Podunavlje, returnees, refugees and so-called refugee-immigrants, who are all entitled to equal rights. In order to facilitate the process of return from and to Croatian Podunavlje, the Government points to the Agreement of the Working Group on the Operational Procedure of Return between the Government, UNTAES and UNHCR which gives an adequate framework for the return of refugees to their homes by emphasizing that such return should be carried out in an organized manner in order to reduce the existing tensions. Information is also provided on the status of return to and from the Croatian Danubian region. Requests for returns comprising 42,325 persons have been filed and transmitted to UNTAES which verifies the habitability of the housing premises, following which certificates of return are issued. A total of 1,439 persons had received such certificates by the end of July 1997. As regards the return of displaced persons of Serb origin currently living in the region to their places of origin, a total of 16,556 persons have been registered, about half of whom have filed requests for return, 2,939 of which have been processed. The sale or exchange of property is requested by 3,587 families in the region. Pursuant to the establishment of the Working Group on Return, 439 persons of Serb origin have returned from the region to other parts of Croatia with certificates of return, while 2,000 have returned without such certificates.

64. The Government is determined to implement the Agreement as soon as possible, but the particular matter of concern still remains the return of Bosnian Croats to the territory of the Republika Srpska for which the appropriate arrangements have still not been agreed. The Government states that once the process of return has been accomplished, the Republic of Croatia, a country faced with half a million refugees during the last seven years, will certainly devote its efforts towards developments in the area of early warning.

65. The Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the territory of the former Yugoslavia noted that notwithstanding increased contacts between Croatia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the Agreement on the Operational Procedures for Return, there has been minimal progress on returns. The UNHCR/ICRC programme for extremely vulnerable individuals has facilitated the return of only a small number of refugees from Yugoslavia for reunion with their families in Croatia. As at 6 August, only 172 of the 1,376 potential returnees whose applications had been submitted by UNHCR for approval by the Government of Croatia had been cleared for return. Furthermore, as of

August 1997 the Government Office for Displaced Persons and Refugees had issued no clearances for extremely vulnerable individuals for several months. The Special Rapporteur considers that return of displaced Croats to the region of Eastern Slavonia can only occur as part of an integrated return programme which also ensures that Serbs may return to their homes elsewhere in Croatia in safety and dignity. The Special Rapporteur recommended that Croatia increase its police activity further in the former sectors, since measures taken to date have not yet succeeded in restoring an environment of law and order. She furthermore recommended that the Government take affirmative steps to ensure that reconstruction and employment opportunities benefit Croats and Serbs equally. International donors should continue to insist on good-faith efforts by the Government of Croatia to improve the situation of all residents of the former sectors, including Croatian Serbs, as a condition for continuing international loans and credits.

66. As regards Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Special Rapporteur noted that the international community can provide some security through its presence, but in the long term, only the vigilance of local law enforcement authorities, combined with proper functioning of the judicial system, can ensure favourable conditions for returns. The Special Rapporteur also recommended that the relevant authorities in both entities amend their property laws as proposed by the Office of the High Representative to enable pre-war occupants to reclaim their properties (see A/52/490).

III. STATES PARTIES TO SELECTED HUMAN RIGHTS INSTRUMENTS

67. In total, 30 new accessions were registered between October 1996 and 15 January 1998. Two States acceded to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and four to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, bringing the total number of States parties to 137 and 140 respectively; three States acceded to the Optional Protocol and two to the Second Optional Protocol of the latter instrument, bringing the number of States parties to 92 and 31 respectively. Two States acceded to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, bringing the total number of States parties to 150. Seven States acceded to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, bringing the total number of States parties to 161. Four States acceded to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, bringing the total number of States parties to 104. Four States acceded to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, bringing the total number of States parties to 191, and two States acceded to the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, bringing the total number of States parties to nine (the Convention will enter into force after the deposit of the twentieth instrument of ratification or accession).

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

68. The responses received reveal that mass displacement is caused by a wide range of factors, among which violations of human rights and of humanitarian law are predominant. Mass displacement frequently occurs in the context of armed conflict and regularly results from deliberate acts and policies, often associated with clear patterns of discrimination. The information received

further indicates that the displaced in many cases receive insufficient or inadequate humanitarian assistance, sometimes resulting in life-threatening problems of nutrition and health. Many persons also experience problems of insecurity threatening their lives, personal liberty and physical integrity. Anxiety for the future results not only from persistent obstacles to return to their home areas, but also from insufficient information concerning the conditions of stay in the host country, as well as insufficient vocational training. It also appears that in many post-conflict situations, resentment between groups of populations may persist well after the end of hostilities, indicating the importance of achieving national reconciliation. While the problems mentioned have a serious impact on the living conditions of refugees, the internally displaced are often particularly affected.

69. The multiplicity of causes and problems associated with mass exoduses calls for corresponding multifaceted and comprehensive responses. Since human rights violations occur in all stages of displacement, the protection and promotion of human rights is relevant in all its phases, whether such activities have been designed specifically to address problems of mass exoduses or not. Thus, the strengthening of domestic legislation and national institutions, both governmental and non-governmental, and the promotion of a culture of tolerance and respect for the rule of law are fundamental elements of local capacity-building, both for preventive purposes and in post-conflict situations.

70. The High Commissioner for Human Rights has a particular responsibility for ensuring that protection and promotion of human rights forms an integral part of the approaches taken. The participation of the High Commissioner in the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and in the four Executive Committees should help ensure that the human rights perspective is adequately reflected in the formulation of programmes and allocation of operational responsibilities, and should promote a sharpened focus on strategies conducive to averting displacement. In addition, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights will seek to enhance collaboration with a number of partners at the bilateral level, notably with the UNHCR, so as to be alerted to situations warranting its direct involvement, and to provide its expertise to partners operating in the field.

71. Over the last several years, legislative bodies of the United Nations have repeatedly called for the establishment of an efficient early warning and response system. Early warning has been recognized as an essential tool for undertaking preventive action and mobilizing a response at the earliest stage possible, so that the factors which force people to flee their homes can be mitigated or avoided altogether.

72. Several initiatives have been taken to this end, both within individual United Nations bodies and at the system-wide level. Some of these have been described in earlier reports submitted to the Commission on Human Rights and the General Assembly, 4/ notably the above-mentioned HEWS and the interdepartmental Framework for Coordination, as well as the inter-agency consultations on early warning of new mass flows of refugees and displaced persons, which was established pursuant to a decision of the Administrative Committee on Coordination. It may be recalled that the High Commissioner for

Human Rights participated actively in the establishment of these processes, by providing information and contributing to the identification of relevant indicators (characteristic features of pre-crisis situations).

73. In the course of these early warning activities, progress has been made at the conceptual level and in terms of methodology. Overall, the challenges relate on the one hand to the collection, verification and analysis of relevant information, and on the other to the effective sharing of the results, with a view to formulating appropriate responses in a timely manner.

74. It has been acknowledged that since a multitude of factors may lead to crisis, there is a corresponding need to monitor a wide range of indicators. As the response from CERD exemplifies, a number of United Nations entities engaged in early warning already utilize their own indicators, in accordance with their expertise, to detect situations warranting preventive measures. While expertise-specific indicators may certainly be helpful in detecting upcoming crisis situations, experience has also revealed that emergencies often result from a combination of factors, none of which would in themselves be of a sufficiently grave nature to provide clear signals of an imminent crisis but which, taken together with other factors, would form an overall picture justifying this conclusion. Furthermore, there may be signs of a worsening situation in some sectors of society, while in others there may be improvements. For an early warning system to be reliable, it would thus seem necessary to combine a wide range of indicators, in order to provide a dynamic and comprehensive picture of the situation in a given context. In this context, it is also important to ensure clarity about the content of the indicators utilized, so that information can be extracted and read in the way intended by the source. It will be recalled that both HEWS and the ACC consultations have elaborated broad sets of indicators. The latter initiative also attempted to measure the worsening or improvement of each indicator, and grade its relative impact on the situations under review.

75. Naturally, the identification of causes and their grouping in lists should not be considered as more than a tool for analysis. In order to secure the relevance of information and enhance the quality of the analysis, it is important that all actors possessing the different types of required expertise provide information on a regular basis, and that they are represented in forums where situations are being reviewed. To secure the broadest possible participation, it may be required that these discussions are held in camera, so as to overcome the reluctance of some contributors to be identified as the source of information. However, it is essential that the conclusions of the review are disseminated as widely as possible, so that not only decision makers within the United Nations system, but also Governments and other operational actors can be alerted to potential emergencies. Transparency would allow for all relevant actors to take measures in accordance with their skills and potential, even outside a formal coordination mechanism. To this end, the dissemination of early warning information through electronic means, such as ReliefWeb, should be further expanded.

76. Clearly, the monitoring and review of developments at global, regional and crisis-specific levels are resource-consuming activities, both in terms of time and of financial and human resources. Efforts have been made to minimize such costs; while the ACC consultations maintained a short list of indicators

for global review, the HEWS monitors only a selection of relevant indicators. It would seem useful that the ACC consultations be resumed and the two processes linked together, so that a more detailed analysis is conducted only for crisis-prone areas. Utilizing a more detailed list for such situations would also facilitate the formulation of concrete recommendations, thereby also enhancing the prospects for a rapid and focused response.

77. Given the assumption that early warning is a cost-effective way of minimizing human suffering, it may be questioned whether adequate attention and resources have been allocated for this purpose. At the same time, however, although some may have doubts about the practical outcome of early warning activities, it should be noted that it is difficult to demonstrate the achievements of an early warning exercise, but easy to demonstrate its failures. Even so, it should also be noted that early warning activities still remain at an early stage of development and that sustained support is required if they are to become truly effective.

78. Also, one must recognize that in many recent situations, the relevant information has in fact been available, albeit not in a very organized form, and still no concrete action has been taken, due to the absence of necessary political will. Thus, while efforts to improve the technicalities of the early warning machinery should continue, one must equally give attention to its corollary, namely the political will of States to take the necessary action.

Notes

1/ E/CN.4/1994/43, E/CN.4/1995/49, E/CN.4/1996/42 and E/CN.4/1997/42.

2/ ACC/SNC, Report on the nutrition situation of refugees and displaced populations, No. 21, 26 September 1997.

3/ Ibid., No. 22, 12 December 1997.

4/ See reports cited above in note 1, and A/50/566, A/52/494.